

Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact

Feral Swine Damage Management in Hawaii County, Hawaii

United States Department of Agriculture,
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service,
Wildlife Services

March, 2008

1. Introduction

The County of Hawaii, Department of Research and Development (Hawaii County R&D) has requested the assistance of United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services program (Wildlife Services) to respond to an increasing level of complaints and manage the damages and threats by feral swine (*Sus scrofa*) on the Island of Hawaii (Hawaii County) in the State of Hawaii.

The EA presents an analysis of the potential impacts of the proposed integrated feral swine damage management program to assist the public with resolving damage to property and crop damage, and address issues around the safety of young children, the elderly and livestock. Government officials and others are also concerned about the presence of diseases in feral swine that can be transmitted to livestock, people, and pets. The proposed action was compared with a “No Action” alternative and an “Integrated Management with Option to Relocate to Public Hunting Areas” alternative.

I have reviewed the January 2008 EA and the public and agency comments received on the EA, and I have decided to adopt the proposed action and implement the integrated feral swine damage management alternative as described in the EA, and to issue this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

2. Purpose

The purpose of the selected program is to assist the public in Hawaii County with alleviating feral swine damage as described in the EA. The need for action as described in the EA presents the nature and extent of feral swine threats and damages in Hawaii and also discusses how the information obtained from the proposed action will provide health officials with information on the prevalence of brucellosis and pseudorabies in feral swine. In addition, Wildlife Services will assist agency resource managers by providing information on the nature and extent of feral swine damages for future management plan development.

3. Issues

The following issues, fully defined in the EA, were identified during the NEPA process as important to Wildlife Services, the cooperating agencies and the public, and were used to drive the environmental analysis and compare the impacts of the alternatives.

- Impacts on target species
- Impacts on non-target species
- Effects on social and economic values
- Disease issues
- Effects on other environmental resources

4. Decision and Rationale

The alternative courses of action were developed based on the reasonable options that could be used by Wildlife Services to assist requestors with alleviating feral swine threats and damages. For the reasons indicated below, I have decided to select the proposed action as described in the EA and to issue a FONSI.

Alternative 1: Proposed Action and Integrated Wildlife Damage Management (Also the “No Action” Alternative)

The proposed action is an integrated feral swine damage management approach. Based on variables encountered in the field, Wildlife Services will select the most appropriate methods to use. Cage traps will be the primary method of capture, but corral traps, leg snares, shooting, and potentially the use of dogs may be used. Feral pigs that are live-captured will have blood samples drawn for disease surveillance. Test results will be furnished to the County of Hawaii. All pigs will either be euthanized on site or taken off-site for euthanasia, and properly disposed of per local statutes and Wildlife Services policies

Based on the analysis in the EA, the proposed alternative was found to have negligible commitments of irreversible and irretrievable resources (from the use of fossil fuels and electrical energy), and would not have any significant cumulative effects on wildlife populations including any protected species. The EA described that the cumulative removal of feral swine by all sources, both short and long term, would not significantly affect the feral pig population in Hawaii County. The proposed action is expected to have minimal negative effects on non-target species and no effect on protected species but is likely to provide benefit to native species, pets and livestock by removing a destructive omnivore that can do direct damage by predation, and indirect damage by habitat destruction. Feral swine in Hawaii are a valued game species, however the EA finds that the proposed action would not affect hunting opportunity since removal would not occur in public hunting areas. The use of cage traps and euthanasia is considered to be a humane option and will be used to the extent practicable. The proposed action would provide some economic benefit by stopping or reducing damages. This action will result in increased knowledge of the prevalence of swine disease since blood samples will be analyzed and information shared with cooperating agencies. Swine carcasses do not pose a disease threat

to humans, livestock, or other animals if handled properly. Literature provided to carcass recipients outlines proper handling and precautionary procedures. The proposed action would potentially provide benefit to vegetation, soils, wetlands and native species by removing non-native animals that cause habitat destruction by rooting behavior and feeding/predation on native plants and animal species. The proposal does not have the potential to affect historic properties.

Alternative 2 – No Action

Under this alternative, the EA describes that while WS would not provide direct control assistance, the State of Hawaii DLNR would probably provide a limited amount of assistance. Feral swine populations that could not be hunted by private hunters or removed by private pest control operators would probably continue to thrive in areas where they conflict with residential and agricultural practices. Wildlife Services would not affect non-target species or social or economic resources associated with feral swine, provide information on swine diseases or participate in disease surveillance, or Wildlife Services would have no other positive or negative environmental effects since it would not take action to manage feral swine damage.

This alternative was not selected because it would not allow Wildlife Services to use its expertise to assist the County of Hawaii and the public with resolving feral swine complaints. The County approached the Wildlife Services for assistance because it did not have the capacity to respond to the number of complaints it received.

Alternative 3 Selective Relocation to Public Hunting Areas

This alternative would allow for the relocation of feral swine to public hunting areas under certain conditions. The effect on the feral swine population under this alternative would likely to be somewhat lower overall than the proposed action, since some pigs would be returned to public lands. The EA found that the potential for a negative indirect effect on non-target species was likely to be greater than under the proposed action because swine relocated to hunting areas could potentially modify native plant and animal communities and prey on other species, or threaten other wildlife, livestock, or pets if they roamed out of hunting areas. This alternative could provide additional hunting opportunities and would accordingly benefit those people who rely on pig hunting for economic, nutritional, recreational and/or other social benefits. The possibility that relocated swine may roam into jurisdictions outside of the hunting areas, adds potential liability to additional property owners.

Participation in disease surveillance activities would be the same as under the proposed action. However, blood test results would not be available prior to relocation, thus it is possible that transported swine could transmit diseases. Swine would be ear tagged prior to relocation so that positive disease test results could be provided to the hunting community through local hunting organizations. This alternative would be likely to have at least some negative effect on soils, vegetation, wetlands, and potentially other species since high numbers of feral swine can be environmentally destructive. Relocation of swine under Alternative 3 could cause indirect ground disturbance and potential associated risks. No additional differences were found.

5. Public Involvement

Public participation in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the pre-decision EA was conducted consistent with Wildlife Service's NEPA procedures. Issues related to the proposed action were identified from Wildlife Services, cooperating agency input, prior public involvement for similar EAs, and a 30-day public comment period for the pre-decision EA. The pre-decision EA was prepared in consultation with cooperating agencies and a pre-decisional EA was issued to the public in January 2008 via direct mailings to individuals and groups thought to be interested in the proposal, publication of legal notices in Honolulu Advertiser, West Hawaii Today and Hilo Tribune Herald, and posting the document on the Wildlife Services NEPA web page at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/regulations/ws/ws_nepa_environmental_documents.shtml. Public comments received on the pre-decision EA are noted below. A notice of the availability of this Decision and FONSI will be issued to the public in the same manners as the pre-decision EA.

Public Comment 1. Commenter supports program but does not support County funding sources for parties served . Fencing is the only solution.

Response. Wildlife Services recommends fencing when it is appropriate, however, fencing can be cost prohibitive. The commenter is referred to the County of Hawaii to discuss the funding source issue.

Public Comment 2. It should be a legal requirement to disclose the existence of feral pigs on certain parcels to potential buyers of real estate. In this way, no government agency would be responsible to mitigate wildlife damage in residential areas, especially when those areas were historically forested areas where feral pig populations existed previously.

Response. This comment is outside of the scope of authorities of Wildlife Services, and outside of the scope of this analysis. Wildlife Services authorities with wildlife damage management are discussed in the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

A careful review of the EA indicates that there will not be a significant impact on the quality of the human environment as a result of this proposal. I agree with this conclusion, and therefore, determine that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared. This determination is based on consideration of the following factors:

1. The proposed activities will occur in localized areas on specific properties in the County of Hawaii as requested by members of the public experiencing feral swine damage, who fall with the criteria defined in the EA. The proposed activities are not national or regional in scope.
2. The proposed activities will not significantly affect public health and safety. The methods used to control feral swine are target specific and are not likely to affect public health and safety. The proposed activities are intended to benefit human health and safety by alleviating threats from feral swine.
3. The proposed activities will not have an impact on unique characteristics of the geographic area such as historical or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecological critical areas. The nature of the methods proposed do not affect the physical environment.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment of the proposed activities are not highly controversial. Although some people are opposed to some aspects of wildlife damage management, the methods and impacts are not controversial among experts.
5. The possible effects of the proposed activities on the quality of the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks.
6. The proposed activities do not establish a precedent for actions with future significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. There are no significant cumulative effects identified by this assessment. The EA described that the cumulative removal of feral swine by all sources, both short and long term, would not significantly affect the feral pig population in Hawaii County
8. The proposed activities will not affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places nor will it cause a loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. The methods proposed do not have the potential to affect historic properties.
9. The proposed activities will fully comply with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The proposed activities would have no effect on federally listed threatened and endangered species.

10. There are no irreversible or irretrievable resource commitments identified by this assessment, except for a minor consumption of fossil fuels and electricity for routine operations.

11. The proposed activities will not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

For additional information concerning this decision, please contact Mike Pitzler, State Director, USDA APHIS Wildlife Services, 3375 Koapaka St., Suite H-420, Honolulu, Hawaii 96819.

 4/2/08
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